



## Small Group Learning: 10 Steps to Help Students Prepare for Class

In small group learning activities, we ask students to prepare before they come to class to work in groups, so that they can apply new ideas and concepts. Often students have not come from a culture where they prepare for lectures or small group learning. How can students be motivated to prepare outside of class time? We offer 10 steps grouped under 4 main factors, from the evidence.

### Create Culture and Climate for Reading

1. **State reading requirements/expectations in *course syllabus* and *introduction to the course*.** Be clear about course expectations for reading for class and about the reasons for this type of independent learning. (See 5 Good Reasons, below.) If you are using a text, introduce it early and *explain its benefits*.
2. **Clearly convey the *professional expectations for reading*.** Create a “culture” of reading where all faculty have the same expectations for preparation. Ideally, all faculty should refer to the course text, where applicable, for pre-session or supplemental reading.
3. **Be a good role model.** Show students that you read too, as a part of your professional and lifelong learning roles. Demonstrate your familiarity with the assigned reading, and discuss with them other texts, articles and journals that you consult regularly.

### Establish Relevance (Purpose) for Readings

4. **Explain *how* and *why* you are using this preparatory material.**
  - **In small groups activities**, build from the foundations of the reading. Link to, but do not repeat the material. Develop activities that assume students have acquired necessary background. Students will see how they have “lost out” when they are unable to participate in engaging case discussions, because they lack foundational knowledge.
  - **“Without this learning, you cannot...progress”:** Be explicit about the purpose of this preparation and link to the rest of the session: e.g. to introduce new key terminology, or to learn about causes of illness to understand patient symptoms.
  - **Remember that reading is intended as preparation for class**, not as a way of covering additional material students have to learn on their own.

### Link Readings to Assessment

5. **Include the learning from the readings in assessment tasks**, provided you have been careful about the learner’s needs in selecting the readings. (See over: *Make readings accessible*.) Assess learning from readings through “Readiness Assessment Tasks” (RATs), assignments (group or individual), self-assessment quizzes, tests, exams, OSCEs, etc. Include preparation and participation as part of assessing independent and group learning skills.

### 5 Good Reasons for Student Reading Outside of Class:

1. Provides additional learning from a reliable source for future lifelong learning
2. Provides a “second professor” for the course—the text’s author
3. Prior preparation allows for deeper understanding of key concepts and links to students’ lives
4. Provides informed discussion. Students are prepared for a richer discussion and application of material—more fun for students and teachers
5. Students become active learners when prepared—they stop “doing stenography” and start critically thinking.

## Make Readings Accessible: Pay attention to the needs of the learner

6. **Select your relevant materials carefully** to help students meet learning objectives for the session
  - a. Be reasonable about the time students will take in preparing—it will be *very* different from your timing.
  - b. Select summary, explanation, demonstration or review articles, chapters or online modules.
  - c. Ensure material is at the *appropriate level of learning, with clear language*.
  - d. Choose *current* material that is directly related to the specific purpose of the session.
  - e. Focus on 1-2 required readings, related to the objectives of a session. Clarify distinction between *Required* and *Recommended* readings. Keep number of pages manageable—e.g. 5-10 pages that are accessible to students.

Students are at the beginning of their learning about topics in medicine. If you can't find an appropriate reading, at the appropriate level, consider building your own. (See below). Need assistance in selecting a text? Go to OHSE Teaching Materials: <http://meds.queensu.ca/ohse> —*Selecting a Textbook*. One great idea? Use student panels for textbook selection.
7. **Post in a timely manner to MEdTech.** Ideally students should have material at least *a week* prior to their session to organize all the readings for the following week.
8. **Select the most appropriate materials.** “Readings” can be from online tests, e-modules, videos, prior lectures, review or summary articles as well as a print textbook that has been carefully vetted.
9. **Give clear instructions and explicit expectations in “Teacher’s Message”** in MEdTech. Refer students to the required reading and give them any additional instructions or guidance. Include reasons why you chose this reading and how it will link to learning in class.
10. **Guide students with the reading to help with understanding and relevance.** Offer key points to note, questions to answer and/or a case study toward which students can work. Or offer an online quiz, or a “q and a” (clicker) session in class to assess, review and clarify misconceptions.

### Building (or finding) your own resources:

Sometimes no text is exactly “right” for your purposes. Many faculty have built their own e-learning modules to meet learning objectives. Contact Lynel Jackson ([lynel.jackson@queensu.ca](mailto:lynel.jackson@queensu.ca)) for resources such as student technical assistants, coaching and software. For a list of all UGME modules, see <https://meds.queensu.ca/central/community/moduleindex>

The Bracken Health Sciences librarians can help you find existing online modules, and also other e-learning resources. Contact Laurie Scott at 613-533-6000 ext. 77694 or by email: [laurie.scott@queensu.ca](mailto:laurie.scott@queensu.ca)

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